

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMING THINGS IN THE NURSERY.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE AIM of all education is to enable the child when it attains to manhood to exercise dominion over the world of realities, and this is done by establishing in our children's minds clear representations of things and happenings.

In the book of Genesis we read that God gave man dominion over all the animals and things of creation (i. 26); and he brought them unto Adam to see how he would call them (ii. 19). The connexion between man's language and his superiority over all other creatures is not fortuitous, for by naming things man gains dominion over them. In language man mirrors the world and classifies its phenomena. Through language alone can he acquire exact knowledge and learn to foredetermine the course of events.

I had occasion to observe the truth of this broad statement when showing to an infant boy the movements of the machinery in a factory. The child was at first frightened by the noise and naturally did not take kindly to the formidable din of the rolling-mill. But it is easy enough to accustom even a baby to any monotonous noise by imitating its sound. The rollers produce two peculiar clangs, —one sharp, the other muffled. When the little fellow was frightened we retreated from the rolling-mill, but I continued to remind him of the noise by the words *clap*, *hum*, which imitated the peculiar sound. He seemed to regain his self-possession, and the banging of the mill ceased to be formidable, for he grew rather curious and turned his head to look. Then he was slowly carried back to the rolling-mill, where he began to anticipate the noise as accompanied by the words *clap*, *hum*. The constant repetition of the words *clap*, *hum*, kept the child prepared for what was coming, and he now soon became accustomed to the sight of the rollers which he began to contemplate, not without awe yet without terror.

I had occasion to make similar observations at the dump of a coal shaft. As soon as a child is prepared for the deafening noise of the falling coal by some adequate imitation of the sound, something like *bum-berum-bum-bum*, he will instead of fear show a desire to watch the process from a place of safety.

In performing such experiments care should be taken that he who carries the baby should never approach either nearer or more quickly than the child desires to go, and children are never at a loss to indicate their wishes unequivocally.

The naming of any happening is the first step towards mastering it. The image of the process, instead of being a bewildering sense-impression, becomes a mental act and is now clearly outlined in a sound symbol. Thus, to the memory of the event itself a new and higher soul-structure, a name representing the event, is added which becomes connected with, and will always at once awaken, a recollection of the original sense-impression. The recollection is comparatively faint, and being not as overwhelming as the immediate presence of the reality itself will allow a calm contemplation of the process. With such preparation a repeated approach will not disturb the child's self-possession. He will now begin to observe, and the former feeling of fear will yield to an eagerness to witness the scene.

There are in the bustle of a factory so many details which should be clearly apprehended, that it will be a great help to the growing intellect of the child if here again the most striking of them are named. While the coal car is being pushed to the verge of the dump, the process may be accompanied by some such words as *rolly-rolly-rolly*. The turning of wheels may be accompanied by rotatory movements of the baby's arm, and you can almost see how thereby the child is enabled the better to watch the rolling. In an analogous way the movement of hammers, the backward and forward motions of pistons, the rotation of cranks, etc., etc., can be imitated, which will help the child to grasp quickly and clearly the elementary features of sense-impressions.

The fires are best imitated by sounding the aspirate, *h'h'h'h'*, bells by *ding-dong*, the puffing of engines by *tch'tch'*, etc., etc.

Adopting this method of naming events in baby language, I succeeded in teaching a very small child the mystery of the reversing lever with its accompanying machinery. When the reverse turned the drum of the coalshaft-elevator in one direction, say to the right, I called the oscillations of the reversing gear *vick vack, vick vack*, and when the lever was reversed and the drum turned in the oppo-

site direction I called it *vack vick, vack vick*. The reversion of the name suggests the reversion of the movement and helps to fix in a child's mind the sense-impression in its essential features. A little steam-engine model (which the late Olmsted Scientific Co. advertised under No. 816 of their catalogue) was an additional help, giving an inside view of the piston and side valves in their connexion with the reverse lever.

The child must have the most essential features of processes and events delineated in his mind in strong outlines and it will then be easy to add the more complicated details without causing mystification or confusion.

That the chicken-yard, farms, sheep-folds, and other places where living animals can be observed should be visited, that birds, dogs, horses, should be watched and their behavior noted, goes without saying, and everywhere the same method should be applied to render the sense-impressions more distinct by gestures as well as names.

If the imagination of the child is thus connected with definite sense-pictures, it will be easy to revive the memories of former experiences; and one is enabled to tell to babies when they are restless either in the evening or at night, stories which draw upon their little stock of memories, and it will quickly quiet them because they are greatly interested in hearing the tales of their own experiences which will be the more interesting to them the greater have been the terrors that had originally to be overcome.

The application of baby language is of manifold use especially at night, when for some reason a child is restless and the usual methods fail to quiet his imagination.

The usual lullaby songs are upon the whole very good; long-drawn notes, words of soothing sound, with prevailing *o* and especially *u* tones are most soporific; but it is sometimes difficult to put babies to sleep, and then you may in a hushed voice which will raise expectancy sing a story consisting simply of the repetition of familiar sounds. The child will listen to the song, nonsensical though it may appear to outsiders and to all people not initiated into the mysteries of baby language. It will quiet down, and give the nurse a chance gradually to change her song to more monotonous lullaby tunes, such as "the rolling-mill goes *clap-bum!*" or "the choo-choo says *ding-dong*," or "the little lamb says *baa, baa*," etc. The baby will listen with as much interest as older children manifest when a fairy tale is told, and the interesting images will by and by be transformed into dream visions.

It is easy enough for a nurse to watch and to influence the growing intellect of an infant, and every nurse ought to be able to account for and understand her charge's vocabulary of those sense-impressions which in the beginning play a prominent part.

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Special attention should be paid to such events and natural phenomena as are apt to frighten children. When thunderstorms come up, the father or mother should take the baby and quiet it. Show it the lightning with signs of an appreciation of its beauty and prepare the baby's ear for the rumbling thunder. The least evidence of fear on the part of the parents will affect the child and may make him a coward for life. Of course, you must avoid coming near the iron pipes and electric wires, and must remain in such places as are comparatively safe. Moving about is upon the whole better than staying in one place, because it diverts the child's attention from the formidable impression. It must be remembered that troops under fire who remain inactive break down and lose courage sooner than troops who are advancing or are otherwise kept busy.

In this connexion we may mention the ridiculous fear which ladies sometimes exhibit when a mouse runs across the floor. Parents should see to it that their babies never witness scenes of shrieking and the seeking of chairs for refuge at the appearance of these poor rodents. Wherever such things are likely to happen, they should be ridiculed in the presence of the child, so as to counteract in time their injurious influence. Let children (if there are mice in the house) rather learn to watch the mouse coming out from its place of safety, let them learn to keep quiet for a while and see what the little creature will do, and you will from the beginning extirpate that foolish sentiment of horror which is so common even among grown people.

These hints, if observed, help to establish in the child a self-possession which in later years will be so much needed.

Which impressions should be the first stratum of the child's soul, depends of course on surroundings and other conditions. However, we must expect that the comprehension of facts will be followed by a determination to handle the realities which have been watched in early childhood. Therefore when machinery is shown, the child should at once learn with what care and precautions it must be handled.